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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002837

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [MOFS](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ABSENT GOT LEADERSHIP, TURKISH MILITARY LAUNCHES
MAJOR ANTI-PKK OPERATIONS

REF: A. ANKARA 02525

[1](#)B. AFOSI DET 522 INCIRLIK AB

[1](#)C. IIR 1 663 3629

(U) Classified by Polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons: E.O.
12958 1.4 (b,d).

(U) This is a joint Adana/Ankara cable.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Contacts report heavy Turkish military presence in southeastern Turkey. Adana PO reports that, while rural flows of recruits to the PKK may be occurring, contacts are not seeing a similar phenomenon from urban areas. Absent any Erdogan government strategy for dealing with the Kurds, the PKK or the southeast in general, Turkish military is countering renewed PKK insurgency with major field operations. PKK, reportedly trained in much more sophisticated bomb-making by Ansar al-Islam in n. Iraq, continues to smuggle not only C-4 and A-4 explosives, but also RDX, into Turkey for expected urban operations. A leading Kurdish politician and long-standing contact notes widespread conviction among Kurds that deeper elements of the Turkish State are using the PKK and jailed leader Ocalan to disrupt formation of viable Kurdish political alternatives and to put the Erdogan government under pressure. End summary.

Continuing Attraction of the PKK

[1](#)2. (C) Consulate officers met with Hakkari attorney Rojbin Tugan on May 6 in Adana. Tugan was pessimistic about the chances of a moderate Kurdish political force counteracting the political "hegemony" of the PKK among the Kurdish population in the Southeast, and even in neighboring Iran, any time in the near future. The PKK represents most of the people in southeastern Turkey, she claimed; she has heard reports from towns in Hakkari, Sirnak and Mardin about dozens of young people leaving to join the PKK in the Qandil mountains. Many go out of Kurdish solidarity in the face of GOT inattention to more moderate Kurdish demands for cultural recognition, she believes, rather than due to identification with PKK ideology. Embassy Ankara contacts in the southeast and leading Kurdish politician Hasim Hasimi have made the same point to us.

[1](#)3. (C) While Tugan has heard of strong support for the PKK in provinces bordering Iraq, contacts in Diyarbakir on May 9-10 had different perceptions of the PKK's recruiting ability. Contacts there who work regionally did not rule out rural flows of recruits in provinces near the Iraqi border, such as Hakkari and Sirnak, but did not think the organization was getting people from urban areas in the numbers it had in the past. (Note: They also pointed out a slow, but steady village return process in some areas of southeastern Turkey which are distant from traditional conflict areas. Government officials in Diyarbakir, Van and Dogubeyazit noted this slowly progressing trend as well, but did not overstate it to PO. End note.)

[1](#)4. (C) Seymus Diken, an advisor to the Mayor of Diyarbakir, along with Sahismael Bedirhangoglu, President of the Southeast Businessman,s Association, recalled times in the 1990s when "whole classrooms" from Dicle University would head south to join the PKK. "That just doesn't happen anymore," they claimed. Additionally, they are hearing less about people giving financial and material support to the organization, they said, and when they do hear about, less financial support is flowing than in the past.

Come on, people, there's a problem here

[1](#)5. (C) Tugan, while at pains personally not to endorse the idea of amnesty, legitimately pointed out that many people convicted in the past by the now-abolished State Security Courts, which did not meet EU standards, have lost their right to appeal their cases to the ECHR, as Ocalan did, because too much time has passed. In the absence of an amnesty, she said, the state must at least acknowledge a problem. "Erdogan can't even bring himself to utter the word 'Kurd'," she claimed, adding, "Come on, people, there is a problem here."

Bolu Brigade Back in Hakkari?

16. (C) Tugan stated that the current military presence in Hakkari is higher than it has ever been, despite the fact that so far she has not heard of a corresponding PKK mobilization into Hakkari province from Qandil mountain. The Bolu commando brigade, accused of gross human rights violations in the 1990s, and the Kayseri Jandarma brigade, have reportedly been deployed in the region, and she said there has been a return of checkpoints, at which troops treat the local population "rudely", in places and numbers that have not been seen since the state of emergency (OHAL) period. Tugan claimed that even EU Ambassador Kretschmer was advised by the military not to travel from Diyarbakir to Hakkari recently, due to a lack of security in the region.

17. (C) In a May 11 conversation with Adana PO in Van, the representative of UNHCR's Van field office (strictly protect) corroborated Tugan's observations about the increased military presence in Hakkari province. Upon the recommendation of security officials, UNHCR staff recently called off a fact-finding trip to Yuksekova, where they had hoped to check upon the conditions of recent returnees from the Makhmour camp in northern Iraq. They reported seeing frequent aircraft activity overhead heading south, and also noted frequent cuts to the mobile phone network in the area, beyond what might be considered normal disruptions in coverage, when forces were reportedly undertaking activities. PO experienced one of the cuts to the network himself on the morning of May 12.

Military Deployments

18. (C) PKK attacks and GOT operations continued apace during PO's May 9-12 visit to the region. On May 13, just the day after PO's departure from Dogubeyazit, three security forces were wounded in a "gun and bomb" attack there. On May 13, two Jandarma members were killed and three injured in a PKK attack in Bingol apparently as Consulate LES transited the province.

19. (C) While PO was traveling in the region, larger than usual Turkish rotary lift was observed in Diyarbakir, where four UH-60 and two UH-1 helicopters were in clear view at a Diyarbakir military airport. In Van, a single UH-60 was observed at the Van civil-military airfield, but there were clearly visible support arrangements in place for a larger number of tactical helicopters which at that time of day may have been active elsewhere nearby. Contacts consistently spoke of brigade sized deployments of Turkish Army forces in Hakkari and eastern Sirnak. Some mentioned that Bolu Brigade by name. There have been press reports of additional Jandarma units in battalion strength brought into the Bingol area from elsewhere in Turkey. Additionally, during the evening of May 9, there were several hours of heavy Turkish F-16 flight activity at the Diyarbakir civil-military airport.

110. (C) An Embassy Ankara source with deep contacts in the military and intelligence agencies told polcounselor May 16 that the Turkish military has launched a two-part operation involving 28,000 troops. One v-shaped movement is sweeping southward through Tunceli, the other v-shaped deployment is sweeping westward in the Tatvan-Bitlis-Bingol area. Our source reported that, as of May 15, twenty security forces and forty insurgents had been killed and a number of insurgents had been taken prisoner "in condition to be interrogated." Six more security forces were reported killed May 17.

111. (C) Once the snows at higher elevations have melted, the military plans a major sweep through Hakkari and Sirnak provinces parallel to the border with Iraq, our source reported. He noted that the PKK and another leftist terrorist group -- TIKKO -- are collaborating in Tunceli province. As a result insurgent activity has reached such a high level that travel between Elazig and Tunceli is now possible only by escorted convoy and the area around Ovacik district in northern Tunceli province, the scene of prolonged, bitter fighting in the 1990's, is no longer under Turkish authorities' control after dark. Given that (1) the current government has transferred or exiled the national police's (TNP) most experienced anti-PKK officers; (2) other, uncoordinated police arrests have disrupted the authorities' ability to keep track of the PKK courier network among bomber cells; and (3) Erdogan ordered the break-up of the interagency anti-terrorism operations coordination group in the National Security Council, the Turkish authorities are currently overwhelmed, especially in trying to track or break up PKK urban operations planning, our source said.

112. (C) Our source also alerted us that, in addition to intensified smuggling of C-4 and A-4 into Turkey, the PKK is continuing to bring in RDX. He says that use of A-4 in bomb attacks will lead to further leaks to the Turkish press by anti-U.S. elements in the security services that the U.S. is

tacitly or more directly aiding the PKK. Our source added that PKK bomb-making has increased significantly in sophistication owing in part to PKK insurgents' training by Ansar al-Islam in northern Iraq. The bomb which recently killed a police officer in the Aegean tourist center of Kusadasi was an example of highly sophisticated manufacture, he said: the bomb was wired to go off when the music player automatically shut itself off, breaking the circuit, at the end of a song.

Comment

13. (C) Amidst the PKK's renewed aggressiveness questions linger about the PKK's connections to deeper parts of the Turkish State. It is common knowledge among our contacts who have been involved in, or followed, counter-insurgency activity that at the PKK's founding meeting in the Ankara squatter district of Mamak in 1978, "every institution of the deep State was represented at the table." It has also been reported in the press that Ocalan worked for the Turkish National Intelligence Organization while a student in the 1970's. In unguarded moments Turks will ask how it is that since at least the early 1990's the PKK has been able to run such significant amounts of narcotics through the heavily-monitored southeast to Istanbul and Western Europe. Good contacts -- and Cabinet ministers -- have asked us how it is that PKK terrorist leader Ocalan, incarcerated in the maximum security prison on the island of Imrali, was able to write a letter in May 2004 directly threatening the AKP government and have it delivered. Many contacts, both Turks and Kurds, quietly wonder to us whether certain elements in the Turkish State, benefiting from the PKK's narcotics trade and the need to keep substantially larger security forces on active duty than would otherwise be necessary, would prefer not to have the PKK wiped out.

14. (C) Pointing to Ocalan's statements in praise of the Turkish State since his capture, Hasim Hasimi and other right-of-center Kurdish politicians have long asserted that Ocalan made a deal with the Turkish State. Hasimi points to Ocalan's recent neo-Marxoid, anti-American jargon about "confederalism without a state" as an example of incomprehensible rhetoric designed to keep Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran off balance and wary of one another. He notes to us that village guards in the southeast have told him they are under orders not to impede the infiltration of PKK guerrillas. While conceding that the Turkish military might have wanted to draw guerrillas into Turkey, where military forces could corral them, Hasimi also thinks the military wants to use the increased PKK presence to put pressure on the AKP government.

15. (C) With movements of additional military forces into areas traditionally associated with seasonal PKK activity, we expect sustained, intense clashes will continue. In the absence of an Erdogan government policy toward the Kurds, the PKK, or the southeast in general, the Turkish military is left to address the renewed PKK challenge. This failure of leadership and vision on the part of the Erdogan government is perpetuating the polarized political atmosphere. End comment.

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